Chapter Five

Conclusion, Recommendations and Suggestions

5.1. Conclusion

In the present research an attempt has been made to study and to assess the actual English language tests used for the undergraduate level to find whether it can be a sound basis for identifying the reasons for the gulf between the principles and practice of Communicative language testing. For the purpose the English language tests of the First and the Second year BA, B. Sc and B.Com Compulsory English Courses at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) of the academic session 2009 – 10 were analyzed in the backdrop of its course objective(s) and the theoretical specifications of Communicative language testing.

A part of this study (Chapter I), besides providing the statement of intent of this thesis and a tentative chapterization, expresses its concern over the state of affairs regarding the practice of language testing in an English language programme. This chapter, at the very outset, claims that though testing has always been viewed in principle a cardinal constituent of a language curriculum, it has remained neglected due to the lack of proper application of testing principles into actual practice. In addition, this chapter also makes an attempt to define and distinguish such related terms like – ‘evaluation’,
‘assessment’ and ‘testing’ – which are generally used interchangeably by the stakeholders of English language teaching programmes.


Besides the historical survey, this chapter also summarizes the purpose and functions of the various types of language tests like ‘Proficiency Test’, ‘Placement Test’, ‘Progress Test’, ‘Achievement Test’, ‘Diagnostic Test and such other binaries of test types as ‘Direct versus Indirect Testing’, ‘Discreet point versus Integrative Testing’, ‘Norm-referenced versus Criterion-referenced Testing’, ‘Objective versus Subjective Testing’, Computer adaptive testing’, and ‘Communicative language testing’. In addition to this, this chapter also reviews the characteristics of language tests through a
discussion on such aspects as ‘validity and its sub-types like content validity, criterion-related validity, concurrent validity, predictive validity and face validity’, ‘Reliability’, and ‘Practicality’.

A sufficiently detailed discussion is made on the Communicative language testing and its theoretical backdrop in Chapter III. It starts with the background to Communicative approach where the major shifts, since 1960s in English language learning and teaching, like the ones from ‘mastery of language structure to language use’, from ‘perceiving language as a set of rules to a means of communication’, from ‘Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis to Inter-language Hypothesis’, and from ‘linguistic competence to communicative competence’ have been seen as the contributing factors for the emergence of Communicative language testing. In addition, this chapter summarizes the principles, characteristics, content and marking criteria of the Communicative language testing. Another major aspect of this chapter is a discussion on the stages of Communicative test construction, under the heading ‘Mechanics of Communicative Test Construction’ where it is suggested to decide on the purpose, techniques, wash-back effect, content, format, and operations of the language tests for the four basic skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – are elaborated in terms of Pre-writing, while writing, and post writing activities. This section raises the
issue of sampling, piloting, moderation and providing scoring key/marking criteria for a communicative language test. This chapter sums up with a discussion on the problems pertaining to the Communicative language testing.

Chapter IV analyses the actual language test of BA, B. Sc. and B.Com first and second years Compulsory English Course at AMU in order to identify the reasons for the gulf between the principle and practice of Communicative language testing. This chapter explores that English has occupied a central position at AMU since its establishment in 1875 and that it’s various syllabi of the English language has generally followed the ELT principles of the time. An analysis of the present syllabus of 2009 – 10 helped in identifying its objective as aiming ‘to make the learners proficient enough to use the basic language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – in their everyday life for various purposes’. This brings the objective of the course closer to the aim(s) of the Communicative language teaching as achieving communicative competence for purposeful language use or developing learners’ ability in the target language to take part in acts of communication in real life situations. The course objective at both first and second year levels was found to be the same. The syllabi for both the years are mainly skill-based where the language functions are categorized
and spread over five units under the headings – Reading Comprehension, Writing Skills and Oral Communication (Listening and Speaking). A major portion of this chapter deals with an analysis of the actual language test in the light of the ‘Format for Communicative Test Specifications’. This helped in identifying the following lacunae in the test construction, listed below jointly for both first and second year tests, under the headings of following language skills:

1. **Reading Comprehension:**
   
i. Majority of tests in Reading comprehension fail to be valid, because they fail to test reading abilities of students. In other words they fail to test what they are intended to do under the unit of reading comprehension.
   
   ii. These tests are not even reliable because they do not make the learners perform the task in reading comprehension; rather they test students’ knowledge in linguistic / grammatical forms.
   
   iii. These tests do not even provide real life situation for the students.
   
   iv. They do not match the specifications of a communicative language test, because they cease to be performance-based, context-based, interactive, or authentic text-based.
v. These tests do not even apply the typical techniques - like True-false, Gap-filling, Multiple-choice, Sequencing statements, etc. - of testing reading comprehension.

vi. These tests in general have a problem of designing an appropriate test of reading comprehension. These tests do not appear to have followed properly the pre-writing, writing and post writing stages of test construction.

vii. Absence of a scoring key / marking criteria is a major drawback of these tests in reading comprehension.

2. Writing Skills:

i. These tests in writing skills fail to be valid and reliable in the sense that they do not involve learners into actual tasks and activities.

ii. These tests cease to be even reliable because they fail to make learners perform the task due to inappropriate designing of the test.

iii. These tests in general have a problem of designing an appropriate test of writing skills. They do not appear to have followed properly the pre-writing, writing and post writing stages of test construction. For example, some times while these tests lack in providing verbal / non-verbal inputs, they also lack in involving students in prewriting activities / tasks. Besides this, the students could have been asked to write ‘topic sentence’ and ‘supporting sentences’, as a part of paragraph writing.
iv. These tests are not found to be task-based where students get an opportunity to participate in communicative activities. There is sufficient scope here to provide the students with verbal and/or non-verbal inputs.

v. The tests in writing skills do not involve students in any sentence level activity, such as sentence completion, combination, expansion.

vi. There are generally two types of questions: ‘with verbal inputs’ and ‘without verbal inputs’. This means that other techniques of testing writing like picture cues, guided-writing, building a paragraph outline, etc are missing.

vii. No marking criteria / scoring key are provided to the evaluators with this test.

3. Oral Communication:

i. Tests in Oral Communication are a total collapse. They fail to meet the criteria of a communicative language test. In fact, in no way they are tests in oral communication. No oral communication takes place. Hence these tests cease to be either valid or reliable by any means.

ii. These tests in oral communication resemble the tests in writing which are designed on some situations with no verbal input. Here too students are supposed to write, rather than communicate orally.
iii. What is taught or what is intended to be taught through this unit is not being tested here. That means this test ceases to be either valid or reliable.
iv. Since the test is assumed to be answered in written mode, it exploits no technique of oral communication, such as ‘limited response, picture cues, task response, multiple-choice, short lecture or social context, guided techniques, explanation, paraphrasing, and others’.
v. No scoring key / marking criteria are provided to the evaluators / examiners.

Chapter IV, besides listing these weaknesses in the existing tests at AMU, also provides couple of sample tests / exercises with proposed marking criteria for reading, writing, listening and speaking.

5.2. **Recommendations:**

Based on the above observations, the present study recommends the following:

i. Communicative language test should test communicative skills, rather than aspects of language. In other words, the test should carry hidden linguistic / grammatical forms and the communicative / functions of language should be made obvious. In brief, there should be a focus on communicative process
ii. Students should get an opportunity to perform communication in the test, for which the test needs to be context specific. The test thus should test the ability to deal with discourse.

iii. A communicative test tests what the course wants to encourage among students, so that it could help learning through a Positive wash back based on a proper scoring criteria.

iv. It should be criterion referenced, i.e. whether students can perform a certain task.

v. It should be Valid, i.e. whether the test measures what it intends to test; that is, it should carry high content validity.

vi. It needs to be Reliable, i.e. whether the test makes learners perform the task that it intends.

vii. A communicative test should have purpose of test, context, performance, interaction, authenticity, unpredictability, task-based exercises.

viii. Awareness-raising regarding designing tests at the level of test-setters is required.

ix. More professionalism and seriousness is to be brought among test-setters.

x. In-service trainings, workshops and seminars should be conducted in this direction.

xi. Testing needs to be considered for positive wash-back effect.

xi. Testing of oral communication must be introduced in a valid and reliable manner in the form of internal assessments like small quizzes, sessionals, and viva-voces.

5.3. Suggestions:
More analytical studies (like the present one) of various tests conducted by colleges, universities and state and central board agencies are suggested to be conducted for awareness raising and making language testing an integral part of English language teaching programmes. Initiatives made by CIIL, Mysore in the form of NTS need to be encouraged and its recommendations need to be followed by other institutions.

The present study, thus, focused on inferring the mismatch between principles and practice of Communicative language testing. The findings emanating from this study would certainly help in bridging the mismatch and improving the overall quality of language testing in English Language Teaching Programmes.

References:
